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Helms Says He Can't Recall LBJ Talk on Israeli A-Bomb

By John Flalka

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Former CIA director Richard Helms says he has "no recollection" of a conversation with President Lyndon B. Johnson in which Helms reportedly told Johnson in 1968 that the CIA had evidence that Israel possessed atomic bombs.

"I have no recollection of any such conversation," said Helms, who is currently operating "Safeer," a private consulting firm in Washington. Asked whether he had discussed a case involving missing U.S. uranium with Johnson, Helms said "I don't discuss presidential conversations."

Helms was responding to a statement by the CIA's former chief of research and technology, Carl Duckett, who told investigators at the Nuclear Regulatory Commission that Helms had discussed the evidence of the Israeli bomb with Johnson and that Johnson had stated:

"Don't tell anyone else, even Dean Rusk and Robert McNamara." Rusk was Johnson's secretary of state and McNamara his secretary of defense.

LATER, HELMS elaborated on his statement, a little, when asked by The New York Times whether he would deny any of the events described by Duckett: "I don't say they didn't happen," said Helms. "I just have no recollection of them."

According to the Times, Walter W. Rostow, who was Johnson's special assistant for national security affairs in 1968, could not remember the events described by Duckett. Rostow is currently a professor at the University of Texas.

Rep. John D. Dingell, head of a House Commerce subcommittee which has been investigating the disappearance of 202 pounds of highly enriched uranium from an Apollo, Pa., plant in the mid-1960s,

said that his staff is aware of the allegations contained in the Duckett interview and has concluded that prior investigations into the loss have been "most serious in their inadequacy."

Duckett, now retired, was interviewed by the nuclear agency as part of the agency's review of the problem posed by the now-defunct Apollo company, called Nuclear Materials and Equipment Corp.

DINGELL SAID staff interviews with Helms, Duckett and others who may have been involved in the case have revealed that an early FBI investigation of the matter was "misdirected," and that a later FBI probe, one begun by President Ford in 1976, has been "uninspiring because of its limited scope."

Dingell's subcommittee has been aided by the General Accounting Office in its probe and is expected to release a report on the NUMEC case within a month.

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